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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

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Key stories in the media:

The major Hebrew media bannered the release of nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu, which will take place tomorrow. Several media reported that Monday Interior Minister Avraham Poraz signed an injunction forbidding him to leave the country for one year. Ha'aretz reported that Thomas Graham, former U.S. president Bill Clinton's special envoy to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) talks, and Avner Cohen, author of "Israel and the Bomb," which details the country's nuclear capabilities, published an article in the May-June issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, which calls on Israel to give up its nuclear ambiguity policy and join the NPT.

Israel Radio reported that the UN Security Council is convening an emergency session to discuss the assassination of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi. The station reported that the Palestinian representative blamed the U.S. for emboldening Israel to assassinate Rantisi by vetoing a Security Council resolution condemning last month's "extrajudicial execution" of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. The PLO representative also linked the assassination with the letters exchanged between President Bush and PM Sharon, which he said contravened international law. The radio notes that the U.S. is expected to veto the resolution.

All media reported that Monday FM Silvan Shalom expressed his support for Sharon's disengagement plan. Yet, Ha'aretz cited the concern of Sharon's advisers, led by his son, Knesset Member Omri Sharon, that Sharon will not win a decisive victory in the May 2 referendum of Likud rank-and-file voters. The newspaper also reported that Sharon is intensifying efforts to gain the Russian vote in the party.

The media reported that eight Israeli civilians were wounded, one seriously, by Qassam rocket fire Monday at the settlement of Nissanit in the Gaza Strip. An IDF soldier was wounded in clashes south of Nablus, while an unarmed Palestinian was killed by IDF gunfire south of Hebron. Maariv cited the suspicions of the defense establishment that Sunday's shooting incident in the Galilee, in which border police killed an Israeli Arab, could be linked to Hizbullah activity in Israel.

Israel Radio reported that the PA is considering canceling the post of Palestinian PM and returning all attributes of authority to PA Chairman Yasser Arafat. Jerusalem Post reported that Arafat phoned several senior Hamas officials in the last 24 hours in an attempt to persuade them to resume inter-Palestinian talks about the establishment of a joint leadership. Ha'aretz reported that a memorandum of understanding issued by the leadership of Palestinian prisoners in Israel under the patronage of jailed Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti calls for a total end to armed struggle emanating from Gaza if a series of conditions are met. The conditions detailed in the document, or "proposal," sent to Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, includes "complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, including the "Philadelphia Route" on the Israeli-

Egyptian border; full Palestinian sovereignty over the Strip, including the sea and air ports; and the release from Israeli prisons of all Gaza residents. In exchange for fulfilling the conditions, "the armed forces in Gaza will be obligated not to conduct any armed actions from Gaza," according to the document.

All media reported that Monday the High Court of Justice handed down stiffer sentences than a district court for Yitzhak Pas and Matityahu Shvu, two members of the militant group of settlers known as the "Bat Ayin underground."

Leading media reported that Monday Bush appointed John Negroponte, currently the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Ambassador to Iraq. As he commented on American and British efforts to turn Iraq into a stable and prosperous democracy, Michael Ancram, the British Conservative Party's "shadow foreign secretary," was quoted as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz: "Attempts to impose Western models in the Middle East could lead to unwanted, even much worse consequences." Ha'aretz and Israel Radio quoted Jewish officials as saying in New York Monday that Iraqi Jews who fled their homeland in the 1950s will receive from the French insurance company AXA compensation for the insurance policies they purchased when they were still Iraqi citizens and still owners of assets and property there. Ha'aretz quoted Ilan Steinberg, the Director-General of the World Jewish Congress, as saying Monday: "This is a breakthrough and justice has been done in an area that has been neglected for years."

Yediot reported that California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger will meet with Sharon on May 2, the day the referendum will be held in the Likud.

Ha'aretz reported that Monday New Zealand PM Helen Clark and senior officials in her government toned down remarks regarding the affair involving two Israelis arrested on suspicion of attempting to obtain fake passports. Yediot reported that the New Zealand government acknowledged that the detainees are Israeli envoys. Citing the New Zealand Herald, Maariv quoted Clarke as saying that the Israelis will be entitled to a fair trial.

Jerusalem Post led with, and other media reported on, an affair involving Transportation Minister Avigdor Lieberman. He allegedly used his Russian connections to help extricate Bank Austria Creditanstalt, the largest bank in Austria, from a sharp drop in the Russian ruble in 1998. Lieberman had stepped down months before as D-G of the Prime Minister's Office under Binyamin Netanyahu.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus, the first journalist whom Prime Minister Sharon apprised of his withdrawal plan, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Terror must not be allowed to torpedo the first political initiative in years to offer a small glimmer of hope for a better future."

Conservative columnist Nadav Shragai wrote in Ha'aretz: "The main difference between all the previous presidential declarations and the one given by Bush is that no Israeli prime minister in the past ever considered initiating a unilateral withdrawal, and certainly not during a war, just to win such a statement from the U.S."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Palestinians' initial responses to the exchange of letters between Bush and Sharon were furious and bordered on the hysterical.... But insult is mendacious diplomatic counsel."

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "It is possible that in the year 2005 it will be Netanyahu who is called upon to implement the disengagement.... Netanyahu too knows that Sharon's disengagement plan is the minimum reasonable offer with which he can visit the capitals

of the world and the region, for he has not forgotten his days at Wye Plantation."

Block Quotes:

I. "Don't Let Terror Ruin Things"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus, the first journalist whom Prime Minister Sharon apprised of his withdrawal plan, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 20): "Bumping off Rantisi was justified. I doubt that even the heads of the Palestinian Authority, including Dahlan, shed a tear over his death.... [Anyway], Hamas wants to reap the fruit of Israel's unilateral withdrawal and evacuation of settlement in Gaza, presenting it as a victory for the group. Israel must be on its guard not to get sucked into this game.... Sharon has launched a dramatic initiative to withdraw Israeli forces and clear out 20 settlements in the Gaza Strip -- a move that President Bush has described as an historic about-face and the first stage in implementing the road map on the way to establishing a Palestinian state. We must take care that terror -- of which there will be more -- and our disproportionate responses to it, do not endanger the disengagement plan or cause the Sharon administration, which is not bowled over by the plan in any case, to turn against it.... Now is the time for Sharon the statesman to eclipse Sharon the general, and the forum of five to act like a political cabinet rather than a subsidiary of the General Staff. Terror must not be allowed to torpedo the first political initiative in years to offer a small glimmer of hope for a better future."

II. "Disengagement Illusions"

Conservative columnist Nadav Shragai wrote in Ha'aretz (April 20): "The political graveyard in which the minister of history buries friendly statements by American presidents to Israel, is already populated by quite a few ... watersheds. Bill Clinton, for example, provided Ehud Barak with exactly the same merchandise that Bush is now giving Sharon. Bush, how embarrassing, even made sure to say in his letter to Sharon that the fact that he doesn't expect Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders is practically an historical fact: "All previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion," wrote Bush. The main difference between all the previous presidential declarations and the one given by Bush is that no Israeli prime minister in the past ever considered initiating a unilateral withdrawal, and certainly not during a war, just to win such a statement from the U.S."

III. "The Palestinians' Turn"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 20): "An Israeli withdrawal from Gaza without disengagement places the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at a crossroads. Gaza after the withdrawal is liable to become a giant Palestinian ghetto.... A Gaza like that will be a humanitarian disaster and a terrorist powder keg. But that very same Gaza Strip after the Israeli withdrawal could also be a cornerstone for a new reality, a stepping stone to the establishment of an independent and democratic Palestine, which was cited explicitly as 'Palestine' in the letter Sharon gave to President Bush. For that, the Palestinians are going to need the world's help, Israeli good will and, above all, Palestinian national resolve.... The Palestinians' initial responses to the exchange of letters between Bush and Sharon were furious and bordered on the hysterical, which only became more pronounced with the insult of the Rantisi assassination. But insult is mendacious diplomatic counsel. The Palestinians have not lacked for mendacious counsel of that kind in the past number of decades. What they have wanted for was truthful counsel."

IV. "Netanyahu's Astuteness"

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 20): "Netanyahu has moved his political address from Against Disengagement Alley to Support Disengagement Avenue, because he is smart, because he is moving to the middle ground in preparation for the battle of succession, and because he has no choice.... The advantage of Sharon's plan is that Likud supporters are capable of swallowing it, because it can be fed to them in small doses. First there was the road map. Now there is the withdrawal from Gaza and four settlements in Samaria [the northern

West Bank]. For this alone Netanyahu cannot unravel the unity of the Likud.... Moreover, the most important thing is still ahead of us and it is two-pronged. First of all there are some grounds for believing that the disengagement plan will never be implemented, and this is a subject for a separate discussion. Secondly, it is possible that in the year 2005 it will be Netanyahu who is called upon to implement the disengagement. This will be when it is clear whether John Kerry will be the next occupant of the White House, and whether the cases of the straw companies and Cyril Kern have sent Sharon back to his farm and his sons to the dock, and in such a case Netanyahu could be the next prime minister. So will he appear as the leader of the opposition on such a central issue? It is not worth his while, because if he becomes prime minister he will have to go to Washington and stand before the Arab world with something more than empty hands. Netanyahu too knows that Sharon's disengagement plan is the minimum reasonable offer with which he can visit the capitals of the world and the region, for he has not forgotten his days at Wye Plantation."

12. Release of Mordechai Vanunu:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel is a law-abiding country. Vanunu served his sentence. Any further extraordinary efforts to silence him will only perpetuate both his status as a symbol and the campaign that has grown around him."

Block Quotes:

"A Damaging Over-Reaction"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 20): "It is entirely possible that the ongoing over-reaction to Vanunu has damaged Israel much more and longer than the one-time publication in the Sunday Times. Given the two obsessions that have become focused on Vanunu -- keeping him silent or making him divine -- it is no wonder that his release from prison tomorrow, after serving all 18 years of his prison sentence, has turned into a particularly charged moment.... Presumably, after his release, Vanunu will continue to serve -- willingly, and with the support of those around him -- as an instrument with which to attack Israel and its policies. The defense establishment's desire to continue to control what he says is understandable even if it is not at all clear what further damage could be caused by someone who has been cut off from any security secret for the last 20 years. But Israel is a law-abiding country. Vanunu served his sentence. Any further extraordinary efforts to silence him will only perpetuate both his status as a symbol and the campaign that has grown around him."

13. Iraq:

Summary:

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If one were to write a recipe for failure in Iraq, putting the UN in charge would probably be the place to start."

Block Quotes:

"How to Lose Iraq"
Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 20): "One might think, looking at all the troubles in Iraq, that the place is a hopeless mess. Actually, in broad terms, the situation is surprisingly promising. The basic Western interest is that Iraq enjoy a stable and representative non-despotic government that serves the interests of all three major groupings: the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'ites. All three groups have a fairly strong incentive to support a system with sufficiently robust checks and balances that no one group will be able to dominate the others.... Let's assume that Bush and Blair, having been burned by the UN in the run-up to the war in Iraq, are not entirely naive about just how the UN might try to shape Iraq's post-war future. And let's say that, in an ideal world, the UN could provide a patina of legitimacy and even logistical and troop support for a hitherto controversial allied effort. But the big question here is who is fooling whom. The UN ... has a

long and corrupt history with Iraq.... The UN bureaucracy, France and Russia have a huge incentive to cover up their own complicity in Saddam's pillaging of Iraq, as does the Arab bloc in preventing a successful Iraqi regime from arising. The UN is the ideal vehicle for all these anti-democracy forces. Indeed, if one were to write a recipe for failure in Iraq, putting the UN in charge would probably be the place to start."

KURTZER